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SUBJECT: Embassy Guatemala: January 2010 Merida Report

REF: A) 09 STATE 114752; B) GUATEMALA 27; C) GUATEMALA 7
D) 09 GUATEMALA 1424

11. (U) In response to ref A, Post submits the information below detailing Embassy Guatemala's

Merida activities for January 2010.

Issues for Washington

12. (U) Post conducted a review of Merida funding to date and found that some FY 2008 funds

are still stalled in the procurement process in Washington and no FY 2009 funding has been received at post. Post requests the Department's assistance in expediting the release of these funds. A more detailed review of post's Merida funding, along with post's FY 2010 Merida funding request, will be provided septel.

Internal Developments

13. (U) Guatemala scored a major law enforcement victory with the capture of former

President Alfonso Portillo on January 26. The capture was made possible through the use of NAS helicopters which enabled representatives of the UN-mandated International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), the Attorney General's Office (MP), DEA, National Civil Police (PNC), and the military to quickly reach Puerto Santo Tomas in eastern Guatemala to arrest Portillo and ensure that he was brought before a judge in the capital within the six-hour constitutional limit (ref B). (Note: Portillo was a flight risk and driving to Puerto Santo Tomas would have taken at least five hours through terrain controlled by DTOs.)

14. (U) CICIG presented the conclusions of its investigation into the May 2009 murder of

prominent attorney Rodrigo Rosenberg on January 12. CICIG

concluded that Rosenberg arranged for his own murder. The resolution of this case was important to show the Guatemalan public that a high-profile murder investigation can be successfully resolved in country (ref C). Following the conclusion of the Rosenberg investigation, President Alvaro Colom moved forward with his legislative agenda and announced a structured dialogue with the private sector to discuss fiscal issues, social development, governance (security), and economic recovery. The Embassy will continue to encourage and closely monitor this dialogue.

Implementation Activities

¶5. (SBU) On January 22, the Charge, joined by President Colom, inaugurated the Maritime

Intelligence Center (MIC) near Puerto Quetzal on the Pacific Coast, which will bring together PNC, tax authorities (SAT), Joint Interagency Task Force-South representatives, and DEA personnel to identify suspicious cargo and maritime traffic along the Pacific Coast. The MIC facility was fully established using GOG funds; the USG will now provide training and equipment. (Comment: The MIC furthers the Mission's objective of increasing maritime intelligence in order to disrupt incoming drug-laden ships and seize contraband. End Comment.)

¶6. (U) All remaining English Access Program students (700 in all) began their studies in

January. Half of the USD 800,000 cost of this program is being funded through the Merida Initiative.

¶7. (SBU) NAS helicopters flew two missions for DEA in mid-January targeting U.S. fugitives.

The two Guatemalan military helicopters assigned to the mission could not participate due to mechanical problems.

¶8. (U) CBP officers provided training to SAT and PNC on the use of CT-30 kits at three different

land borders in January. The kit is composed of a fiber optics scope, measuring density device, depth finder and other tools necessary to locate compartments and contraband. This training took place at three different land borders (Agua Caliente, Florido and Ermita) between Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

¶9. (U) Post's Law Enforcement Working Group met on January 26. Post held its Merida

Initiative meetings on January 5 and 19.

Significant USG-Supported Host Nation Seizures

¶10. (SBU) USG law enforcement participation and/or intelligence played an important part in

seizures in January 2010:

- January 4 - Guatemala City International Airport:
Seizure of 600,000 tablets of pseudoephedrine.

- January 27 - A suspicious aircraft flew into Guatemala, first arriving in eastern Izabal Department and then quickly diverting to northern Peten Department, where it eventually landed. With the assistance of Joint Task Force-Bravo helicopters and the Guatemalan Anti-Drug and Terrorism Aerial Intervention Task Force (FIAAT), 352 kilos of cocaine were seized. The alleged narcotraffickers later returned to the aircraft and burned it.

- January 28 - Guatemala City International Airport:
Seizure of 27 kilos of pseudoephedrine in loose capsule form.

- January 30 - Guatemala City: Seizure of USD 420,000 and arrest of one individual. Guatemala's anti-money laundering task force (UNILAT) was heavily involved in this investigation and believes it may be related to the December case in which police arrested one individual and seized USD 1,000,120 (Ref D).

The Month Ahead

¶11. (U) Below are post's planned activities for February 2010:

- The contract for implementation of USAID's primary Merida activities - The Community Action Fund, Youth at Risk crime prevention and Community Based Policing - should be granted in February 2010, with implementation activities to begin in March ¶2010.

- NAS plans to train police officers for the Police Athletic League at the Police Academy.
MCFARLAND